

New Tools of Communication

Approaching the subject of the science of communication from the viewpoint of the political scientist, Dr. Lasswell has, in his interpretation of the function of librarianship in the field of communication, placed emphasis upon the research function of the library:

... one of the major functions of the library in civilized society is to prepare the sources for future historical and scientific understanding of the ever-expanding present.

... the anticipation of useful sources is the peculiar challenge of librarianship.

... it may be feasible for librarians themselves to take the leadership in the gathering of data. Emphasis has been put upon the scientific importance of describing the changing structure of community attention.

Addressed as it is to the readers of *College and Research Libraries*, Dr. Lasswell's approach to the subject has much to commend it, particularly for those readers who are librarians in university or other libraries in which the research function is dominant. Certainly librarians need to preserve and provide records and data for use by scholars, both contemporary and future. Certainly as librarians we need to be active participants rather than passive observers; and the science of communication, as Dr. Lasswell points out, offers genuine opportunity for active and significant study in the science of communication in terms of its community (broadly interpreted) implications.

In the space at his disposal Dr. Lasswell could not give a comprehensive discussion of the implications of the service of communication for libraries. One obvious, and to this writer important, relationship which he neglects is the responsibility of librarians to know and to utilize varied means of communication in their own work. Traditionally libraries have collected, preserved, and circulated the printed page. The new science of communication has conclusively shown that the printed page is but one means of preserving and of transmitting knowledge—is but one agency of communication. The radio, the motion picture, recordings, posters, slides, radio transcriptions are other usable aids to communication that have obvious value.

Implications for colleges of the educational

programs of the armed forces have not yet been defined. It is clear, however, that in these programs aids to teaching other than books and lectures have played important roles. The experience and findings of the armed forces, plus the inevitable improvement in the quality of audio-visual aids due to technological advancements, indicate a trend toward significantly increased use of non-printed aids to learning in the colleges of tomorrow.

The writer has reported elsewhere¹ that although more than 90 per cent of some four hundred colleges studied provided visual education science, less than 10 per cent of the colleges centralize this service in their libraries. Significantly, however, half of the colleges indicate that in their judgment the library *should be* the centralizing agency for visual education service.

This situation offers a challenge, an opportunity, and a responsibility to the college librarian. We, as librarians, can choose to be passive observers of an inevitable trend which will change teaching, advance learning, and, whether we like it or not, modify the function of the library. On the other hand, as college librarians we can be active leaders in providing through our libraries the very best aids to communication and to learning—motion pictures, recordings, radio transcriptions, slides, and other aids as they are developed and prove useful.

My initial thought in reading Dr. Lasswell's article was one of regret that he had failed to stress the important fact that the library which recognizes the implications of the science of communication will broaden its concept of library materials to include the latest aids to communication and to learning. On second thought, however, I am almost pleased that Dr. Lasswell neglected this important implication for the college library, for his neglect has given me an opportunity once more to state my conviction that as college librarians we must take leadership in providing and encouraging the use of the newer tools of communication.

¹ Johnson, B. Lamar. "Audio-Visual Aids and the College Library." *College and Research Libraries* 5:341-46, September 1944.